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House International Relations Committee
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights & International Operations
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“Angola Needs a Binding Date for Elections”

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the Committee, I want to thank the Chair for inviting my colleagues and I to be part of this important hearing.

On April of 2002, we signed the Luena Memorandum of Understanding, to conclude the implementation of the Angolan Peace Accords. It was a **Social Contract** whereby, UNITA agreed to demobilize its army in exchange for a full democratic process. Among other things, this Social Contract entails:

- Addressing the fate of thousands of demobilized soldiers and veterans of all wars;
- De-politicizing the country's public service, including the National Police and the Armed Forces;
- Abolishing all State Security Organs reminiscent of the One-Party Rule era;
- Working toward reconciliation, equal opportunities and economic development;
- Protecting and promoting citizenship rights, including the right to elect the government.

Mr. Chairman, four years after the signing of the Luena Memorandum, we have witnessed developments we must be proud of and shortcomings we must, rightly, be concerned about.

In June 2003, UNITA held a transparent and democratic congress, which elected the current leadership. Since then, we strove to improve democracy within our ranks. We strongly believe that a non-democratic party cannot promote democracy in the society.

On the bright side, we have maintained peace in the mainland; there are tentative steps to deal with the conflict in Cabinda through dialogue; Angolans are increasingly debating the need to strengthen democracy and economic reform; there is a growing civil society; the beginning of economic recovery; and an increased movement of goods and people.

On the dark side, a) The majority of veterans are left to their own fate without benefits or pensions; b) Democracy is still moving at two speeds. One for Luanda, the capital, and another for the provinces, away from international scrutiny, where citizens are still subject to political discrimination, repression and limitation of their rights; c) The economic boom resulting from the oil windfall, remains an exclusive affair of a few. General living conditions are deteriorating in an environment of unequal access to credit, unemployment and poverty continue to raise and so do basic prices, increasing the pain of most citizens. d) Finally, the government is wavering in its commitment to hold free and fair elections.

Elections deferred

In 2004 The Council of Republic, recommended the holding of elections in 2006. Soon after, President Dos Santos, visited Washington and promised during a (2004) White House meeting, that he would call for elections no latter than 2006. The president of the National Elections Commission and the Speaker of the National Assembly, have both indicated, in 2005, that Angola was capable of holding elections in 2006. Indeed, the National Assembly has appropriated over \$200 million for elections, in the 2005 and 2006 budgets. We are now in July of 2006 and we still have no date for elections.

Mr. Chairman, a broad segment of Angolans believes that there is a breach of the Social Contract, which calls into question the legitimacy of the governing institutions. This breach is best illustrated by quoting President Dos Santos who, on November 11, 2005, stated that, "*Democracy has been imposed upon us by the West.*" He went on to say

that, “*Democracy does not fill our stomachs.*” Following these statements, we have witnessed a substantial slow down of the institutional efforts to organize elections.

Meanwhile, the government managed to secure absolute control of the National Election Commission (NEC), through disproportional representation. Eight out of an 11-member body are from government-linked institutions and three from the opposition.

It is a matter of public record that Angolan relations with China have increased considerably. Thousands of unemployed Angolans watched astonished as waves of Chinese cheap labor came into the country following the concession of Chinese oil-backed loans to Angola. All these activities are beyond scrutiny and likely to fuel corruption.

While we welcome steps to improve the country’s infrastructure, we are extremely concerned with the temptation to view **China as a model of development**. Angola needs a transparent, diversified and job-generating economic development. We need, above all, to invest in our human capital and stop losing thousands of our best citizens every year to curable diseases.

Where do we go from here?

Angolans must not be given a choice between political freedom and economic development. They deserve both. Economic development must take place in an environment of democratic institutions. Four years after the war ended, it is time to bring this uncertainty to an end.

We call on the international community and the United States in particular, to:

- Join the majority of Angolans in urging the government of Angola to commit to a binding date for elections in 2007.
- Double efforts to assist the emerging civil society strengthen its capacity;

- Assist the private press in broadening its reach throughout the country;
- Assist the NEC with resources and expertise in order to discharge its duties in an even-handed manner.

Elections are an important instrument to renew the trust between the government and the people, and a process through which the country's suppressed energy can be released to realize individual and collective dreams. A democratic Angola is more likely to promote regional democracy and secure a safe political environment conducive to a mutually beneficial development of energy and other resources. It is, therefore, in the interest of Angolans, the region and the United States, that democracy prevails. I urge you, once again, to assist Angola in achieving these noble goals.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for your attention.